



Good Practice when working with GRT pupils and their families.

## Darlington Traveller Education Service

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## 1. What to do when a new GRT pupil arrives to join your class

### *Confidence Building*

Consider how they are feeling about being new and about any possible anxieties. Prepare for their arrival as much as possible so on their first day they are able to feel as though they are welcome and belong in the classroom.

Make sure that the child has the following in place:

- A peg to hang their coat
- A named tray for their belongings
- Reading book as soon as possible
- Reading diary.
- All the correct books, maths, English (not just paper)

- Avoid negative comments and ensure that the child is treated the same as any other new arrival to the class
- Quickly build up a relationship with the child and allay any fears
- **Set up a buddy system with a child in the class to help with classroom rules and expectations.**
- Make sure that the child is given opportunity to discuss school rules and expectations. (May have been in a number of schools with different rules and expectations and so therefore maybe daunting and confusing.)
- Use every opportunity to raise self-esteem and aspirations.

### *Assessing their academic strengths and weaknesses*

When the new students arrive in your class it is likely that they have experienced various school transitions and gaps in education, so it is important to find out where they are at and quickly close any gaps they may have.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS FOR ASSESSING:

Quickly baseline where they are regarding English and Maths and Reading. Put additional provision in place to close the gap. Set aspirational targets and differentiate the work to their level.

### ***Uniforms and classroom equipment***

Every school has different expectations. Spare P.E kits will need to be available. Avoid comments like, "Not again! You borrowed it last week!"

## **2. Returners**

Some traveller families have set travelling patterns over the year. Other families travelling are more sporadic and less defined. When a child returns to school after a period of travelling, they may experience the very same anxieties as any other child who has moved schools.

#### **BEST PRACTICE TIPS FOR RETURNERS:**

- Welcome the child back
- Avoid negative comments like "Well you've got a lot to catch up on!" or "I'm sorry that you don't know what's going on but you've missed so much!" Travelling is part of their culture and therefore they should not be made to feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. Travelling is not in their control; it's their way of life and dictated to by their parents and their patterns of employment.
- Re-establish a buddy system so that they can familiarise themselves with routines.
- Ask positively about their travelling experiences, just like you would if a child emigrated or moved for a number of months. It may give those people working with them and the class an insight into their lifestyle and their cultural experiences.

## **3. Building relationships with GRT families**

Building good relationships with families is crucial. It pays great dividends and is well worth the investment. GRT families want you to be honest, upfront and reassuring. Their own personal experiences of school may have been poor. They can be fearful about sending their children to school and overprotective and consequently keep them off school for minor ailments or because of playground disagreements. They can also be embarrassed about their own low levels of literacy.

#### **BEST PRACTICE TIPS FOR WORKING WITH FAMILIES:**

- Do not assume parents can read or write
- Equally don't assume that they can't read or write
- Parents may find very lengthy newsletters difficult to read
- Use text messages to communicate with GRT families.
- Be diplomatic and supportive and offer to read letters to them and help them fill in forms. Reassure them.

#### 4. Homework Challenges

Children from GRT families find homework difficult for a number of reasons:

- Lack of space within the trailer
- Lack of quiet to concentrate on homework.
- Lack of support for the children
- Children won't get asked "Have you done your homework yet?"
- GRT parents may not have the necessary literacy skills to help the child with their homework.
- Children will more than likely not be heard read and parents may not be able help read unknown words.
- Culturally reading and writing skills are not seen as important, although there may have been a slight shift in cultural attitudes in Primary school.
- The children may not be able to do research at home due to lack of Wi-Fi or printers

#### BEST PRACTICE TIPS FOR ISSUING HOMEWORK:

- Sensitivity needs to be used and the offer of completing the homework in school.
- Set up a homework club.

#### 5. Cultural Awareness and Barriers

It was once thought that Gypsies and Travellers lived in caravans or trailers. This view is outdated. The majority of Gypsies and Travellers in the UK live in houses and Chalets, however traditional ways of life are still retained. Some families still travel for work for many months of the year. The children may attend a number of schools in one year. They may have a base school which they remain on roll on when they are travelling. This is known as dual schooling. Many Travellers do not complete their education. Attendance may be sporadic and consequently they are the lowest achieving ethnic minority group in Great Britain.

- Cultural differences and expectations for girls and boys.
- Children may be withdrawn from ICT safety activities like Cyber Bullying or more specifically Sex and Relationship Education.
- Consequently many children miss out on important PSHE lessons.

## 6. School Trips

Many GRT children are not allowed to attend off-site school trips. This is because the community has a fear of allowing their children to travel on coaches or be out and about with less supervision. It is important to establish good working relationships to encourage the attendance on these trips so these children can experience the same variety of lessons as their school peers.

### Top Tips to Increase Trip Attendance:

- Ensure that the parent/carer has received the trip letter. As these are often left in book bags, offer to read the contents of the letters.
- Accompany letter with phone call home in case of literacy difficulties.
- Make arrangements for the GRT children to be grouped with an adult that they know and trust.
- Persuade the parent/ carer to accompany the trip as a group/parent helper.

## 7. Distance Learning

Many travellers spend a period of time travelling. The travelling periods may be for a few weeks or months at a time and sometimes the children may leave quickly with little to no notice.

It is important to establish good working relationships with the parents. Parents with good working relationships with class teachers will generally inform the school if they are going off travelling. The school has a duty to respond to their needs and provide distance learning packs which are suitable and relevant. There should be a designated member of staff who will monitor the work that is completed on their return. The children need to know that this work is valued. This helps to raise the profile of schoolwork and acts as an incentive to try to complete the work.

Little support may be offered by the parents and carers. Sometimes the very nature of the work is a conflict of interest and the children may not be encouraged to complete it. Or the parents and carers have low literacy skills and are unable to support their children's learning.

## 8. SATS and Secondary School

Some families may have no experience of Secondary school and feel that Secondary school is not an appropriate cultural option for their children. This maybe because they are suspicious of what might be taught in Sex and Relationship Education and will be exposed to talk that they do not want them to hear from their peers or there are fears of bullying. Some children are expecting that they may not go to secondary school. For some families their children leaving formal education at Year 6 is a cultural expectation. Some families are fearful of their children doing formal tests such as SATS and will remove their children to go EHE early on in Year 6.

### GOOD PRACTICE TIPS:

- Assess through discussing with the child what they think their educational journey might be, transition to secondary school or Elective Home Education.
- Bring parents on board early on to discuss transition and offer additional support to the student and the family. Offer accompanied visits to the secondary school with support of the Traveller Education Service
- If the parents are intending to opt for Elective Home Education the school should make it clear that there is no tutor or resources support and the responsibility for the students future education rests solely with them. Parents should be encouraged to send their children to secondary school. This should happen in advance of any meetings about EHE.
- Children of parents who intend to EHE should not be encouraged to leave Primary school prior to the end of the school year and miss SATS. All children have an entitlement to be educated.
- Parents should not be encouraged to take their children out of school and Home Educate their children, especially prior to Year 6 SATS. (Off rolling)

## CULTURAL PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS and ASPIRATIONS FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Gypsies and Travellers hold different expectations of what might be taught to children. They are quite formal and will not allow their children to hear about anything to do with

body parts, pregnancy and sex education. This may come into conflict with statutory expectations in Science and Sex and Relationship Education.

- In order to allay fears and removal of their children it is better to be transparent about what is being taught.
- Consultation regarding SRE and statutory requirements for September 2021- Arrange a meeting with the parents of GRT to discuss what is going to be taught. Include PSHCE coordinator and senior staff.
- Seek reassurance and guidance from Catherine Shaw RESH Coordinator or Traveller Education Service.
- A more flexible approach may be needed so that early opting for EHE is avoided - improvement in attainment outcomes and changes can only occur if the GRT attend school.

### SEN and Outside Agencies

The Gypsy and the Traveller culture is very private. They are also very suspicious of outside agencies.

- If you feel that a child had special needs you may find that the parents are unwilling to engage, this is not a reflection of their care for their child, it may come from a fear that they may be shunned by their community.
- Gypsy Roma Traveller women are more likely to be available to talk about SEND and their children's progress in the afternoons.
- Parents may not be able to read or write. Try to explain clearly about the issues that you have noticed and avoid jargon language.
- Allow the parents the time to go away and think about what you have said. They may be reluctant and fearful at first, particularly if you want to involve outside agencies such as Educational Psychologists.
- The parents may need additional support with lengthy reports and form filling. Be supportive and understanding.
- Make extra effort to build relationships.

## Home Learning and Digital Barriers

- Many services being offered throughout COVID have been signposted towards technology. This is an alien environment to many GRT, especially those who have got poor IT skills and poor literacy skills.
- One in five Gypsy and Traveller participants had never used the internet, compared to one in ten members of the general population.

### **GOOD PRACTICE TIPS:**

- Not all GRT can access to the internet or have the skills to work remotely.
- During lockdown, even when provided with IT equipment many families found it hard to use
- Always check whether families have IT or wifi if asking them to work remotely or do research. They may need extra support in getting going.
- Provide IT in school such as lunch times so that these children do not feel excluded.
- Run workshops to upskill the parents in the use of IT.